

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows.

The listing of claims below will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

LISTING OF THE CLAIMS:

Claims:

Claim 1. (Previously presented) A device for treating flat and flexible work pieces with a processing fluid, the device comprising:

- i. a processing tank containing the processing fluid;
- ii. at least one protective carrier for receiving the work pieces and being adapted to be received by the tank containing the fluid;
- iii. a transport system being adapted to convey the work pieces to the tank
- iv. a transport system being adapted to introduce the work pieces into the protective carrier;
- v. means for transferring the protective carrier together with the work pieces into the tank; and
- vi. at least one aperture in the protective carrier that permits the fluid to flow into the protective carrier in such a manner that the work pieces within the protective carrier will not substantially deform and/or shift position

Claim 2. (Original) The device according to claim 1, wherein the fluid is a wet-chemical or electrochemical processing fluid.

Claim 3. (Canceled)

Claim 4. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 3, wherein the protective carrier comprises side walls and a bottom wall, the apertures being evenly spaced apart and distributed over the side and/or bottom walls.

Claim 5. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 3, wherein the size of each aperture ranges from 1 to 500 square millimeters.

Claim 6. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 5, wherein the apertures are provided with displaceable shutters and/or orifice plates for varying the size thereof.

Claim 7. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 4, wherein the apertures are not provided in the border regions of the walls of the protective carrier or wherein they are smaller in diameter in the border regions and/or they are provided in a reduced number in the border regions than in the central regions for the purpose of achieving an electrical shield relative to a counter electrode.

Claim 8. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 4, wherein the bottom wall has at least one drain baffle or at least one drain gate.

Claim 9. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 2, wherein at least one means for creating a difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier is provided, so that the processing fluid is allowed to flow into the protective carrier.

Claim 10. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 9, wherein the means for creating the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier comprises at least one reservoir and at least one delivery system by means of which the processing fluid is circulatable from the reservoir to a tank space

located in the tank and outside of the protective carrier

Claim 11. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 9, wherein the means for creating the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier comprises at least one stationary protective carrier hoist which is associated with the tank and by means of which the protective carrier is conveyable into the tank.

Claim 12. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 9, wherein the means for creating the difference in the levels inside and outside the protective carrier comprises at least one protective carrier hoist which is mounted to a transport carriage for the work pieces and by means of which the protective carrier is conveyable into the tank.

Claim 13. (Previously presented) The device according to claim 12, wherein the protective carrier is made in at least two parts comprising a bottom baffle and two opposite side baffles which are automatically actuatable and can be opened before the protective carrier is lifted out of the tank, the work pieces remaining within the tank.

Claim 14. (Previously presented) A method of treating flat and flexible work pieces with a processing fluid in a tank containing the fluid, the method comprising:

- i. providing a protective carrier at the tank, the protective carrier comprising at least one aperture;
- ii. conveying the work pieces to the tank;
- iii. introducing the work pieces into the protective carrier;
- iv. transferring the protective carrier together with the work pieces into the tank
and
- v. treating the work pieces with the processing fluid.

Claim 15. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 14, wherein the fluid is a wet-chemical or electrochemical processing fluid and is supplied to the protective carrier through at least one aperture therein.

Claim 16. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 15, wherein, for filling the protective carrier with the processing fluid, a difference in the levels of the processing fluid is created inside and outside the protective carrier, said difference causing the processing fluid to flow into the protective carrier.

Claim 17. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 16, wherein the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier is created by conveying the protective carrier to the tank or disposing the protective carrier in the tank while the processing fluid is supplied to the tank.

Claim 18. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 16, wherein the difference in the levels of the processing fluid inside and outside the protective carrier is created by conveying the protective carrier into the tank holding the processing fluid.

Claim 19. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 17, wherein the protective carrier is conveyed to the tank using a stationary protective carrier hoist associated with the tank.

Claim 20. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 17, wherein the protective carrier is conveyed to the tank using a protective carrier hoist mounted to a transport carriage for the work pieces.

Claim 21. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 17, wherein the processing fluid is circulated from a reservoir into a tank space which is located in the tank and outside the protective carrier.

Claim 22. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 15, wherein the processing fluid is circulated through the apertures of the protective carrier, said protective carrier comprising side walls and a bottom wall and the apertures being evenly spaced apart and distributed over said walls.

Claim 23. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein the apertures are not provided in the border regions of the side walls of the protective carrier or wherein they are smaller in diameter in the border regions and/or provided in a reduced number in the border regions for the purpose of achieving an electrical shield relative to a counter electrode.

Claim 24. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein, for filling the protective carrier with fluid, the processing fluid is allowed to flow through the apertures in two side walls of the protective carrier only, said side walls being oriented parallel to the work pieces.

Claim 25. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein, for filling the protective carrier with fluid, the size of the at least one aperture is adjusted by means of a displaceable shutter and/or an orifice plate according to the mechanical sensitivity of the work pieces.

Claim 26. (Previously presented) The method according to claim 22, wherein, for fast draining of the fluid from the protective carrier after treatment, the bottom wall of the protective carrier is provided with at least one drain baffle or at least one drain gate which is opened and through which the processing fluid is allowed to exit.

Claim 27. (Previously presented) The device of claim 1, wherein the protective carrier is localized at the tank.

Claim 28. (Previously presented) The method of claim 14, wherein the protective carrier is localized at the tank.

Claim 29 (New) A device for treating flat and flexible work pieces with a processing fluid, the device comprising:

- i. a processing tank containing the processing fluid;
- ii. at least one protective carrier for receiving the work pieces and being adapted to be received by the tank containing the fluid;
- iii. a transport system being adapted to convey the work pieces to the tank
- iv. a transport system being adapted to introduce the work pieces into the protective carrier;
- v. means for transferring the protective carrier together with the work pieces into the tank; and
- vi. at least one aperture in the protective carrier dimensioned to control the flow of fluid into the protective carrier in such a manner that the work pieces within the protective carrier will not substantially deform or shift position.